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SUBJECT: SHARM EL-SHEIKH CONFERENCE FOCUSES ON PANDEMIC THREAT,
BRINGS TOTAL AVIAN INFLUENZA ASSISTANCE TO \$3 BILLION

11. SUMMARY: The October 25-26 Sixth International Ministerial Conference on Avian and Pandemic Influenza, Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt, in cooperation with the International Partnership on Avian and Pandemic Influenza (IPAPI), succeeded in maintaining global focus on the spread of avian influenza and the threat of a potentially devastating pandemic. The United States, Japan, and Norway pledged over \$350 million, bringing cumulative international pledges since 2005 to over \$3 billion. Over 120 countries attended, including 63 ministers -- the most since the first IPAPI meeting (Washington, 2005), and the five IPAPI-supported meetings that followed. Participants addressed three main challenges:
-- Ensuring that the world is fully prepared to mitigate the effect of an influenza pandemic or another unforeseen catastrophic epidemic;
-- Sustaining efforts to control highly pathogenic avian influenza (AI), especially in poultry, and eventually to eradicate the H5N1 virus from domestic animals in the countries that still suffer from it; and
-- Initiating longer-term responses to infectious diseases that emerge at the animal, human, and ecosystem interface.)

12. Under Secretary for Democracy and Global Affairs Paula Dobriansky's announcement on the first day of a U.S. pledge of \$320 million in new avian and pandemic influenza (API) assistance dominated media coverage and energized the conference. Under Secretary Dobriansky also warned against "flu fatigue" and underscored the need to maintain global momentum. Participants emphasized that the pandemic threat is real and necessitates another conference a year or more from now to maintain global momentum on two fronts: multi-sector pandemic preparedness, and programs evolving from an avian and pandemic-influenza-specific approach to the broader emerging infectious disease approach, or the concept of "One World, One Health." Vietnam is likely to host the next conference in March 2010. The IPAPI Core Group met twice on the margins of the conference. END SUMMARY.

13. The International Ministerial Conference on Avian and Pandemic Influenza, October 25-26 in Sharm el-Sheikh, was the sixth and largest major international meeting on API since 2005, attracting some 530 delegates (63 of them ministers) from over 120 countries, 26 international and regional organizations, and others. The U.S. delegation was led by Under Secretary Dobriansky and included Ambassador Margaret Scobey, Special Representative on Avian and Pandemic Influenza John Lange, USAID Assistant Administrator Kent Hill, USDA Deputy Under Secretary Charles Lambert, HHS Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary Gerald Parker, and DHS Chief Medical Officer/Acting Assistant Secretary for Health Affairs, John Krohmer.

14. Egyptian Prime Minister Ahmad Nazif, Agriculture Minister Amin Abaza, Health Minister Hatem el-Gabaly, World Organization for Animal Health (OIE) Director General Bernard Vallat, World Bank Vice President Jeffrey Gutman, Food and Agriculture Organization Deputy Director General Jim Butler, World Health Organization Deputy Director General Anarfi Asamoah-Baah, and UN System Influenza Coordinator (UNSIC) David Nabarro addressed the conference.

15. Sessions addressed such themes as the host country's experience and vision for the future, analyses of best practices and challenges for the control of avian and pandemic influenza (API), pandemic preparedness and response, control of API and emerging diseases at the animal-human interface, community mobilization and communication, resource analysis, and a pledging session. On the margins of the conference, there was a USG media roundtable and an Egyptian press conference that included a USG representative (reported septel).

TRANSPARENCY, EDUCATION, AND PREVENTION: EGYPT'S EXAMPLE

16. The Egyptian hosts were eager to place the overall fight against API in the context of their own experience. (Avian influenza is endemic in Egypt's poultry and with a total of 50 human cases, 22 of which were fatal, Egypt ranks among the top three endemic countries.) Accordingly, Health Minister al-Gabaly set the tone of the conference by speaking about Egypt's own history of API (with the first cases in poultry in February 2006 and in humans the following month), and underscored that governments need to sustain efforts as outlined in previous international conferences to focus on transparency, education, and prevention, with the latter topic addressing both animal and human aspects of the disease. The

Egyptian presenters noted the country's establishment of appropriate emergency committees even before the initial outbreak, Egypt's poultry vaccination program, and improvements in their veterinary laboratories and hospitals for diagnosing AI in animals and treating it in human patients. (Egypt's AI human mortality rate of 44 percent is significantly lower than the global rate of approximately 64 percent.) They repeatedly drew attention to the country's justly-lauded pattern of complete openness to the global community with respect to AI -- "Transparency should be the cornerstone of an international strategy,"-- while citing their progress in the communications/education field (through, for example, using famous local actors and singers in TV spots and travelling presentations, and more than ten million visits to homes by education teams). The governor of al-Qalyubiyeh Governorate, which produces 60 percent of the country's poultry, provided a detailed "case history" of the province's experience with AI.

ANIMAL HEALTH

17. Time and again, the theme was hammered home that there can be no human cases without animal cases, and that "all it takes to start a pandemic is one dead bird." As OIE's Vallat put it, "Good governance means good veterinary services." Accordingly, qualified veterinary services capable of surveillance and treatment are the shock troops of any country's defense. The experience of the last year has shown that early detection and rapid response have prevented the endemic establishment of AI in most countries in which infection has appeared, a fact that gives new impetus to the need to improve global veterinary services. As USDA Deputy Under Secretary for Marketing and Regulatory Programs Charles Lambert put it, "The effort cannot be driven solely by human health concerns, for it also requires the health of agriculture" (i.e., the poultry industry). African Union program coordinator Samuel Muriuki shared the perspective of that continent's experience: "Investment in strengthening the veterinary services is the most sustainable means to combat API in Africa." The Wildlife Conservation Society's William Karesh approached the need for qualified veterinary experts from the perspective of wild birds: the Global Avian Influenza Network Surveillance (GAINS) forum was already studying AI in wild birds prior to the arrival of H5N1, and thus far has recorded 103 million wild birds in its database--a figure expected to reach 300 million in three months. He also emphasized the importance of veterinary services by observing that it is now virtually confirmed that it is domestic animal disease that finds its way into wildlife, and not, as had been suspected, the other way around.

HUMAN HEALTH

18. WHO's Asamoah-Baah noted, in a statement quoted during the conference, "If a pandemic breaks out, a bail-out or rescue won't work. It will attack Wall Street, Main Street, and regions where there are no streets." Especially in light of the "flu fatigue" phenomenon, the conference's many presenters stressed the inevitability of a pandemic, and agreed that success in combating AI usually reflects such factors within each country, at the local and national levels, as the sustained engagement of political leaders, surge-capacity capability, collaborative action across government ministries (including health, agriculture, environment, disaster response, and civil defense services), the continuous engagement of the private sector and civil society, and transparent communications. Participants emphasized the need to continue to support the WHO Global Influenza Surveillance Network through the timely sharing of viruses or specimens with WHO collaborating centers, and highlighted the need to increase vaccine production capabilities. (Note: The controversial issue of influenza virus sample and benefit sharing was not on the conference agenda because the issue is being dealt with by the WHO Intergovernmental Meeting on Pandemic Influenza Preparedness [IGM]. End Note.) A common theme was the need to identify and mitigate the effects of the disease on vulnerable people, as well as the need to bring veterinary and public health systems in poorer countries up to global standards for disease prevention -- a staggering task requiring sustained, long-term international investment. Participants also stressed the need to develop, test, and update pandemic plans. They called for the full implementation of the International Health Regulations (which Denis Coulombier of the European Center for Disease Prevention and Control called "an enormous achievement"), noting that low-income countries will need significant support to enable them to meet all requirements. Major emphasis was placed on significant progress on the human-health

front within Europe, in contrast with major deficiencies in developing countries (especially Africa). The plea of a former Egyptian health minister summed up the situation: "Egypt needs huge amounts of money. Donors' contribution is vitally needed."

LONGER-TERM ACTION: PANDEMICS AND EMERGING INFECTIOUS DISEASES OF ANIMAL ORIGIN

19. The year's Sharm el-Sheikh conference broadened the focus from past years' gatherings from a concentration on the threat of the H5N1 virus to spark a pandemic to include placing the disease in the broader context of global health. USAID Assistant Administrator for Global Health Kent Hill, for example, spoke on how API preparations can relate to other diseases of animal origin, and he called for broader transitional strategies to cope with this widening phenomenon. UNSIC's Nabarro placed a slightly different gloss on the proceedings: he reviewed advances made since the New Delhi conference in December 2007, using as his guide the "Fourth Global Progress Report" issued in October by UNSIC and the World Bank. He described the international community's key goals as sustaining efforts to control and eventually eliminate HPAI in animals, preparing for a pandemic, and ensuring longer-term action: responding to infectious diseases that emerge at the animal, the animal, human and ecosystem interface. He noted that participants at the New Delhi conference had recommended that the international community draw on experiences with HPAI to develop a medium-term strategy to address emerging infectious diseases, and drew attention to the document "Contributing to One World, One Health: A Strategic Framework for Reducing Risks of Infectious Diseases at the Animal-Human-Ecosystems Interface," developed jointly by FAO, OIE, WHO, UNICEF, the World Bank, and UNSIC in response to recommendations made in New Delhi.

COMMUNITY MOBILIZATION

110. Participants noted that national pandemic preparedness efforts need to be undertaken jointly by all stakeholders--representatives of public-sector bodies (both local and national), private entities, and civil-society organization, such as the Red Cross or Red Crescent societies, media organizations, and faith groups-while international organizations should continue to monitor the global state of pandemic readiness and seek ways to support poorer

countries. A Japanese delegate noted that once a pandemic begins, "community mobilization is the most important problem, since it will be our last hope." Special Representative Lange emphasized the need to plan for humanitarian needs during Phase 6 of a pandemic and for "community mitigation" measures, including methods to limit unprotected contact between infected and potentially-infected individuals, from those who are not infected. EC and EU representatives presented evidence of European readiness. Participants also emphasized the need to operationalize "plans on paper", review lessons learned from exercises, and integrate plans into existing disaster management structures. Neighbors were urged to engage in cross-border pandemic planning, especially in the context of regional organizations.

PLEDGING SESSION

¶10. Under Secretary Dobriansky energized the conference early on the first day by announcing the U.S. contribution of \$320 million, bringing the total U.S. pledge of assistance for efforts against API since 2005 to over \$949 million. At the formal pledging session on the second day, Japan and Norway added monies that brought the total for the conference to just over \$350 million. Cumulative international pledges of assistance since 2005 now total over \$3 billion. Many delegates praised the U.S. contribution. World Bank representative Olga Jonas noted, however, that significant funding gaps remain, especially for Africa (\$440 million), East Asia, and the Pacific.

"VISION FOR THE FUTURE"

¶11. UNSIC Nabarro summarized the conference in the context of the document, "A Vision for the Future by the Government of Egypt," that he, the U.S. delegation and others helped draft. It defines future priorities such as addressing inequities among poorer and richer countries in API response capacity and pandemic preparedness; eradicating H5N1 in poultry; the continuing need to develop, test, and update pandemic plans; improve information- and material-sharing and transparency; enhancing strategic communication

and policy advocacy at high levels; preventing and responding to emerging diseases of animal origin; and improving education, training, and research/development. Nabarro alluded to inadequacies in long-term funding, and noted the importance of maintaining the sustained involvement of political leaders.

MEETINGS WITH IPAPI CORE GROUP

¶12. Under Secretary Dobriansky chaired a meeting of the IPAPI Core Group (Australia, Canada, EU Presidency/EC, Japan, UK and U.S.) on October 25 to discuss virus sample/benefit-sharing. Members agreed that the proper forum for negotiations on the issue was the WHO Intergovernmental Meeting scheduled for December 2008. On October 26, Special Representative Lange chaired a Core Group meeting that also included international organization representatives to discuss next steps after Sharm el-Sheikh, including suggestions for the next major international conference (likely to take place in Vietnam in February-March 2010). Canada described its plans for a conference in Winnipeg in February-March 2009 to discuss the concept of One World One Health with interested stakeholders.

SCOBEE